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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: RIGHTS ACTIVISTS PLEASED BY HU JIA'S SAKHAROV
PRIZE, SAY IT PRESSURES CHINA WITHOUT HUMILIATING IT

REF: REF: BRUSSELS 1639

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Following the October 23 announcement that prominent Chinese rights activist Hu Jia won the European Parliament's 2008 Sakharov Human Rights Prize (reftel), Hu's wife and fellow activist Zeng Jinyan (protect) told PolOff November 1 that she is "very happy" about the award, calling it "an achievement for human rights defenders in China." Other rights activists agreed that Hu's winning the award is a positive development, even as they doubt it will produce any quick "reforms or improvements." One contact argued that the award is useful for promoting human rights because it pressures Beijing without humiliating the country or its leadership. PRC netizens reacted mostly positively, although several indicated they did not know who Hu Jia is. End Summary.

ZENG JINYAN "VERY HAPPY" ABOUT HU JIA'S AWARD

12. (C) Following the October 23 announcement that prominent Chinese rights activist Hu Jia won the European Parliament's 2008 Sakharov Human Rights Prize (reftel), PolOff spoke on November 1 with Hu's wife, fellow rights activist Zeng Jinyan. Zeng told PolOff she was "very happy" to learn about the award, calling it "an achievement for human rights defenders in China." Zeng said she plans to tell Hu Jia about the award when she next visits him in prison. (Note: Zeng told PolOff that, after the award announcement on October 23, PRC prison officials on their own initiative proposed that Zeng meet Hu Jia on November 5, after previously having denied her visit requests on many occasions. Zeng said she believes there is a "direct connection" between Hu Jia's award and the decision by officials to arrange the prison visit. Subsequent to her conversation with PolOff, however, Zeng posted an entry on her blog dated November 3 stating that PRC officials postponed her meeting with Hu until November 21. Zeng complained in her blog that prison officials ignored her telephone calls before informing Hu's mother of the change in date. Post has had no opportunity to speak directly with Zeng since the reported postponement of the prison visit.)

ACTIVISTS PLEASED BUT DOUBT QUICK IMPROVEMENTS

13. (C) Reaction among other rights activists and scholars with whom PolOffs spoke was positive but measured. Rights lawyer Mo Shaoping (protect), Cathay Institute head and

dissident scholar Liu Junning (protect) and Tsinghua University Communications Professor Zhou Qing'an (protect) each said separately that the decision to award Hu Jia the Sakharov Prize is a "positive development." Mo told PolOff that the European Parliament's decision to honor Hu Jia will "push the development of democracy" in China by encouraging Chinese rights protection activists. Liu said that human rights activists in China know about the award and are pleased with the decision. Both Liu and Mo thought the award will keep pressure on China's Government to reform. While Mo said the award "angered" the Chinese Government, he predicted that officials will not take "further steps" against either Hu Jia or Zeng Jinyan, because Hu and Zeng already face a "bad situation." Moreover, the PRC Government wants to avoid the criticism that would result if it clamped down further on them. Despite his positive assessment of the award, Mo nevertheless said he doubts it will spur any quick "reforms or improvements."

AWARD PRESSURES CHINA WITHOUT HUMILIATING IT

¶4. (C) Awarding the Sakharov Prize to Hu Jia is useful, according to Tsinghua's Professor Zhou, because it pressures China without humiliating it or its leaders. The Prize is "a stick, but not too big of a stick," he said. Zhou contrasted the Sakharov Prize with the "more prestigious" Nobel Prize, speculating that if Hu Jia had won a Nobel, that would have provoked a "negative backlash" by authorities, only further worsening conditions for activists. (Note: Zhou added that, regardless, it would have been "inappropriate" for Hu Jia to have won the Nobel Prize, as that award is supposed to

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recognize "many years of work.") Attorney Mo similarly argued that there are many Chinese activists "more deserving" of recognition than Hu Jia, who has only been involved in rights work for three or four years. "Consider the Tiananmen Mothers as an example," Mo said. "They had been working for fifteen years following Tiananmen before Hu Jia first stopped by my office to ask for legal advice." Nonetheless, "While some dissidents will think themselves more deserving than Hu Jia," Mo stated, "all will be happy for him."

CHINESE NETIZENS: WHO IS HU?

¶5. (C) On the Internet, many Chinese netizens reacted to the news about Hu Jia's award by requesting more information, with some expressing confusion over who Hu Jia is. On several Chinese websites, news of the prize was limited to an October 23 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) statement expressing dissatisfaction with the European Parliament's decision and noting Hu Jia's conviction for "subverting the state." A netizen on the liberal BBS forum "Cat 898" complained that "the MFA should describe how Hu Jia committed the crime of state subversion," asserting that "the European Parliament would not have just picked someone at random to win the Sakharov Prize." Another netizen wrote, "I tried to search for Hu Jia, but could not find anything." "Hu Jia definitely ranks as the highest-level national secret," wrote yet another, commenting, "how have I never heard of him?" A posting on the mainstream portal "Neteaze" simply asked, "who is Hu Jia?" Some netizens answered requests for information about Hu Jia by pasting in material gleaned from overseas sites.

ONLINE REACTION NEVERTHELESS MOSTLY POSITIVE

¶6. (C) On the mainstream Internet portal Sohu, meanwhile, bulletin board commentary indicated significant interest in Hu Jia, and generally positive sentiment toward him. For example, the Sohu site carried more than 5,000 comments on the MFA's October 23 statement. Sohu allows netizens to vote on comments, providing a rough measure of user sentiment.

Nearly 1,000 users agreed with a commenter who called on authorities to "put Hu Jia's statements on the table so the public can judge whether they are correct." Only ten people opposed this comment. Other comments receiving strong support included the following: "Subverting the Government is by no means the same as subverting the country; the two are fundamentally different." "Hu Jia has dealt with the environment and the AIDS situation for a long time; we need more diverse views." "How powerful is Hu Jia that he can incite subversion of the Government? Could you list some facts?" Netizens strongly opposed a comment urging Hu Jia's killing, as well as a statement concluding that "the West's acceptance of Hu Jia is proof enough that he is not a good person." Netizens similarly voted down a comment labeling the European Parliament's decision as "Europe's political extortion of China." By contrast, the official People's Daily's "Strong Country Forum" website carried the MFA's comments without any discussion of Hu Jia or his award.

RANDT